

ICPS newsletter®

An advisory committee could help reinforce the voice of the people

An advisory committee could turn out to be one of the instruments for improving the quality of local government by involving the local community. The second phase of the People's Voice Project started with the establishment of advisory committees. The experience of establishing and running such committees was transferred to the new project team during a number of workshops held in six pilot cities under the project. The training materials have now been placed on the project's web-site for open access

The People's Voice continues, a project carried out jointly by the World Bank, PADCO, a US consultancy, and the International Centre for Policy Studies and financed by the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA). The project aims at instituting mechanisms and procedures that will increase the role of the public in developing effective, responsible and open local government in Ukraine. To reach these goals within the project, NGOs in six pilot cities—Alchevsk, Chernihiv, Kolomyia, Komsomolsk, Lutsk, and Makiyivka—will study how to effectively involve the local community in debating local issues, initiating local change and representing public opinion to the local government.

The six cities started their part of the project by establishing advisory committees under local executive bodies. These advisory committees bring together representatives of local government, NGOs, business and the legislature, specialists and journalists. They are open to other stakeholders to participate as well. The role of advisory committees includes finding ways to effectively involve the People's Voice Project: approving local initiatives for municipal services and agreeing financial support from the project's budget for projects by public organizations. The committees consist of two working groups: one responsible for local (municipal) initiatives, the other responsible for projects initiated by local community organizations.

For these committees to operate effectively, it makes sense to develop skills in team-building, reaching consensus while

working on controversial issues, and acting to benefit the common good. These topics were discussed during workshops conducted by Kadria Safiulina and Yulia Svyezhentseva, both professional trainers who have helped establish similar advisory committees in more than 30 municipalities in Ukraine. The trainers provided municipal officials and public organizations in the six cities with their recommendations and shared their own know-how, based on having operated similar institutions in the past. Separate sessions of these workshops were dedicated to developing a theoretical base for involving the general public, models and strategies for public relations, practical ways of helping form public opinion, and so on. Overall, more than 120 people participated in these workshops.

How useful can an advisory committee be?

The advisory committee is a new social institution within the local government system that could become an effective two-way feedback mechanism between the government and the public. The purpose for setting one up is to develop a partnership among all stakeholders.

Having advisory committees offers a number of advantages to the local governing process:

- better understanding of problems by involving specialists from different fields;
- consideration of stakeholders' interests;
- participation in the decision-making process;

- adoption of well-thought decisions reached through open debate and reaching compromise;
- raising the effectiveness of carrying out decisions through public oversight.

Working in the advisory committee requires that members take on additional work and spend additional time that will not be paid. Instead, the motive for participating in an advisory committee should be the opportunity for self-realization, for creative work, participation in local government, and contact city management.

The aims of an advisory committee's activities include:

- increasing public awareness of municipal issues;
- adopting decisions in priority areas of operation;
- solving local problems by taking into account public opinion and the opinions of stakeholders;
- providing support to specific programs and plans, etc.

Advisory committees need to be legitimized

For the purpose of providing each advisory committee with official status and authority, setting it up should be arranged through an appropriate resolution from the local mayor, and the committee itself should operate on the basis of a collective agreement that regulates the establishing and organizing of the committee's activity within the local government structure. Representatives of government institutions should be appointed through appropriate orders to sit on the committee, while representatives of the public should be admitted with their consent.

Participants should be aware that, regardless of any differences in age,

gender, social and economic standing, opinions or beliefs, the advisory committee must develop mechanisms for collective activity in order to reach common goals. The necessary mechanisms can be developed in the form of a collective agreement that specifies:

- the goals, tasks and principles of the advisory committee's activity;
- how often the advisory committee should meet, as well as its composition and structure;
- rules for debating and making decisions;
- distribution of duties among committee members;
- logistical support.

The collective agreement is signed by all participants in the advisory committee. ■

Materials from the workshops "Creating a Team for an Advisory Committee under the People's Voice Project" can be viewed at the project's website at: www.pvp.org.ua. For additional information, contact Volodymyr Hnat by phone at (380-44) 236-4116, or via e-mail at vhnat@icps.kiev.ua.

In the latest issue of Political Commentary...

Political Commentary, a monthly published by the International Centre for Policy Studies, continues analyzing the political situation in Ukraine. In the new issue published July 12, you can read about key trends and changes in Ukraine's international relations, the political struggle in the run-up to the presidential election, government policy, the economy and public opinion

Foreign relations

Russia has agreed to drop the VAT on exports of oil and gas to Ukraine. This concession reflects the effectiveness of President Putin's political approach of tying Ukraine closer to Russia using economic leverage. The US has also decided to try using the carrot as well as the stick in its dealings with Ukraine. For the first time in four years, President Kuchma had a proper meeting with President Bush. The expansion of the European Union has automatically

opened up new opportunities for Ukraine, but Kyiv is not demonstrating great readiness to take advantage of them.

Political competition

The internal situation is marked by expectations that Mr. Kuchma, who has governed the country for ten years, will leave his post. The president has been unable to revive the coalition he had cobbled together in the Verkhovna Rada, which is making it ever harder to

develop decisive policies. The two main rivals for Mr. Kuchma's spot—Viktor Yushchenko and Viktor Yanukovych—are busy pulling together alliances in the run-up to the election campaign. Mr. Yanukovych has so far done better.

Government policy

The approach of the election is resulting in populist government decisions. The Government is significantly increasing social spending and financing it by selling off the country's best large enterprises to business players close to it. The reduction and reorganization of the Armed Forces, which the legislature has agreed, turned out to be urgent decisions. The latest attempt to turn Ukraine into a parliamentary-presidential republic proved unrealistic.

Economic environment

Despite the lack of much-needed reform, the situation on both global and local markets has remained exceptionally favorable for Ukraine. Economic growth continues apace, ensuring a rise in the overall standard of living of the average Ukrainian.

Public opinion

Still, positive economic conditions do not guarantee Premier Yanukovych victory in the presidential race. After a strong rise at the beginning of the year, his ratings have already begun to fall. The undemocratic tactics to which the current Administration is resorting are helping Mr. Yushchenko gain the momentum in this race, although the results are still not easy to predict. ■

Read a complete review of the political situation in Ukraine in the latest Political Commentary monthly.

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Table 1. How Ukrainians would vote if the election were held next Sunday (relative to the day of the poll, %)

	November 2003	December 2003	January 2004	February 2004	March 2004	April 2004	May 2004	June 2004
Viktor Yushchenko	22	23	24	24	24	22	26	27
Viktor Yanukovych	9	9	10	7	12	16	17	18
Petro Symonenko	14	13	10	10	11	10	10	9
Oleksandr Moroz	5	6	5	5	7	5	5	5
Yulia Tymoshenko	5	6	6	4	4	4	4	5
Georgiy Kirpa	—	—	4	4	2	4	2	3
Natalia Vitrenko	4	4	3	3	2	2	2	2
Serhiy Tihipko	2	2	2	2	2	1	2	2
Viktor Medvedchuk	3	3	2	1	1	1	1	1
Volodymyr Lytvyn	1	2	1	1	1	1	1	0
Leonid Kuchma	—	—	—	13	8	7	—	—
Others	3	1	8	1	0	1	—	2
Would not vote	13	11	6	5	7	6	6	5
Against everyone	0	0	7	5	6	4	5	6
Undecided	19	22	16	15	13	15	15	13

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